

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of exchanging electronic documents between a plurality of devices, the method comprising the steps of:

analyzing an electronic document received from a source device, from the result of this analysis deciding whether to transmit the electronic document to some other destination device or deciding the destination of the electronic document that is to be relayed;

10 dividing or merging documents to be relayed in accordance with a predetermined length of the electronic document and allowable stay times for respective destination device; and

transmit the divided or merged electronic document to the destination device.

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2. A device for exchanging electronic documents between a plurality of devices, the device comprising:

an analyzing unit which analyzes an electronic document received from a source device, from the result of this analysis decides whether to transmit the electronic document to some other destination device or decide the destination of the electronic document that is to be relayed;

a dividing/merging unit which divides or merges documents to be relayed in accordance with a predetermined length of the electronic document and allowable stay times

for respective destination device; and  
a transmitting unit which transmits the divided or  
merged electronic document to the destination device.

5 3. The device according to claim 2 further comprising  
a cutoff unit which stops the flow of transmission of the  
electronic document when the number of electronic documents  
generated within a predetermined time exceeds a  
predetermined value.

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4. The device according to claim 2, wherein said  
transmitting unit converts the electronic document into a  
format that is acceptable to the destination device.

15 5. The device according to claim 2, wherein said  
dividing/merging unit keeps the electronic document into  
a waiting list until the allowable stay time has elapsed,  
and within the allowable stay time, merges a plurality of  
electronic documents into a single electronic document that  
20 has a length which is equal to or less a predetermined length.

6. A computer program containing instructions which when  
executed on a computer causes the computer to perform the  
steps of:

25 analyzing an electronic document received from a

source device, from the result of this analysis deciding whether to transmit the electronic document to some other destination device or deciding the destination of the electronic document that is to be relayed;

5        dividing or merging documents to be relayed in accordance with a predetermined length of the electronic document and allowable stay times for respective destination device; and

transmit the divided or merged electronic document  
10      to the destination device.

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